

## **Nick Dubin's Testimony for the 6-2-09 Health Policy Committee Hearing**

Picture a boy. A small, energetic, curly blond haired boy of 3 and a half years. Visualize this boy as he flaps his arms up and down continuously and jumps like a pogo stick as if his legs were made of taffy. This bright, curly haired boy has a problem, though. He doesn't have language. He has no way of verbally expressing himself without resorting to crying or screaming. And he is frightened of other children. If they get near him, he goes berserk. His parents are beginning to wonder how he will ever integrate into the school setting and more importantly, society at large.

As you might have guessed, this was me back in 1980. I was, for all intents and purposes, a classically autistic child. Having no language or social engagement skills made life extremely challenging for me. Living life inside what seemed like a hard turtle's shell was an imprisoning experience. No one could penetrate through it to reach me, and I couldn't penetrate out of it. Even looking back retrospectively, I remember at the time that this was going on I was feeling extremely frustrated that I didn't even have basic language skills to be able to communicate my wants, needs, joys, sorrows, feelings and thoughts to those who I loved. I had the ability to love before I acquired the ability to talk. Even before acquiring speech, I knew even that I had a lot to say and that I had a lot of love to give, but I just could not express it. You can not even begin to know the pain this caused my parents.

But my parents were certainly not helpless. They had virtually the perfect circumstances to be able to deal with a situation like this. Dad worked 3 days a week and mom also worked part time. One of them was always around. They tirelessly took me from place to place; whether it be for evaluations, intense speech therapy, OT, and other therapies. Through the long summer days and nights of 1980, things were beginning to improve. Quite rapidly, I began to acquire speech. I started to be able to tolerate being around other kids. I could communicate my wishes, desires and thoughts...maybe not in complete sentences initially, but with real words.

Fast forward 29 years. I am in the dissertation phase of my doctoral work, have written 2 books for publication and am working on a third, speak nationally on Asperger's, bullying and a variety of other issues and most importantly, live independently. None of this would have been possible without the interventions of 29 years ago and the continuous interventions I received all throughout childhood and adolescence.

Henry David Thoreau said men are born to succeed, not fail. I think this is true. But I also think that in order to succeed, all people need help and support to do so. It is unfair, wrong and immoral that children like me are not being covered by insurance companies for proper treatments that are just as essential as a diabetic who needs his insulin. How much value do we as human beings place on the potential of each child? Can we afford to wait any longer? Not only can we not afford to wait, we can't wait. Please support providing insurance coverage to all families affected by autism. Thank you.